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## THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE COEDUCATIONAL COLLEGE

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This is the most serious problem of the coeducational college. For better or for worse, coeducation has come to the western college, and come to stay; and it is our part to make it as effective as possible in the life of the young people, to strengthen what there is of good in it, and to guard against whatever dangers it brings to college life. That there are dangers in it to be guarded against no one acquainted with the educational situation in the West can doubt. Nothing is so perplexing in the administration of the coeducational college as the relation between the young men and the young women.

No discussion of the social life of the college can be at all adequate that fails to face the deeper facts in the case. In the coeducational college the young men and the young women are necessarily thrown together; by the very organization of the life of the institution they are brought into an associate life. But it is equally true that they are young men and young women; they have each their individual characteristics, tastes, habits of thinking and feeling, and sources of pleasure. They are each distinct in individuality, and therefore they each need for their highest development an individual, separate life. In the man is what the poet calls "the need of a world of men;" he might with equal truth have pointed out the need that is in the nature of a woman of a world of her own sex. The problem in the coeducational college is how to bring together in a larger unity these two facts, to give to the young men and the young women their separate life, and also to unite these two classes of individuals in a wholesome, natural, mutually beneficial associate life.

In the first place, then, our problem is how to secure for each sex in the student body its own separate life. The young men are not so difficult to plan for in this regard as are the young women. The young men more easily find for themselves their separate life. They

make their own life in the study, in the dormitory, in the literary society or the fraternity, in the glee club, in athletics. At the age of the college student, the young man must, for the most part, be left free to establish the metes and bounds of his own life. He cannot be cramped by rules and regulations. He cannot be run into any grooves of convention. The only external power which can be relied upon to aid him much is the influence of men older than himself, in the faculty, or among the towns-people, who have chanced or successfully plotted to win his confidence, and to whom he goes naturally and unreservedly for advice and assistance.

The power of the fraternity house in the separate life of the young men is suggestive of the larger things which are to come when this part of the problem of the coeducational college is fully solved. Because it is the nature of the young man to like to blaze his own ways, we are tempted to neglect him, to spend so much thought and care upon the young women—who, it is true, are the crux of the problem—that the young men are left entirely to themselves in the development of their separate life. It is to be hoped that the time is not far distant when every college of our type will have its building wholly devoted to the interests of young men, thoroughly equipped with whatever is needed to interest and hold them, a young man's club-house, a fraternity house for the whole college. In this will center the varied activities of the college young man—those that express his physical energy, his intellectual ambitions, his religious aspirations, his desire to get near his fellows and talk out with them every subject, grave or gay, that comes into his head. Every college needs its Oxford Social Union (democratized), its Harvard Union, its Y. M. C. A. building, conducted on the broadest lines. The coeducational college needs such an institution for its young men even more than it is needed in colleges for men only. For this separate life is absolutely indispensable for the young man's broadest and richest development. The coeducational college must never permit the sacrifice of what was, and is, the best thing in the college for men only—the fellowship of men with men, the weaving of those student friendships into which no sentimentality can enter, which in college, and out of it, are effective beyond all estimate in the formation of character and the working out of the plans and purposes of life.

The problem of how to secure to the young women a separate life is complicated by the presence, in most of our coeducational colleges, of two classes of young women—those living at home and those living in college dormitories. The college can do comparatively little for young women of the first class in the development of a separate life. They have the varied interests and social ties which the family connection brings. They are not in a position, therefore, to enter unreservedly into a new form of social activity such as centers in the college buildings. What is to be said, then, about a separate life for college young women will apply only to those in college halls. Such a separate life is of the utmost importance in the character development of the young woman. To secure it, therefore, for as many as possible, as well as to protect against the dangers of the associate life, most of which arise because of the inadequate care of the young women by the college authorities, it should be the policy of a coeducational college not to receive young women from out of town who do not plan to reside in the dormitories—the only exception being made in the case of those who come to the homes of relatives in the town, and who then become part of the town student class.

One of the serious dangers in the life of the young woman in a coeducational college is that she will lose what the college for women almost uniformly succeeds in securing—the development of the sense of responsibility and the ability to achieve. In the coeducational college young men are apt to absorb the responsible student work in class administration, college publications, and committee work of all sorts. The young woman, not desiring to assert herself, shrinks into the background and leaves to the young men the work of doing what would be invaluable to her in character development, if she did it for herself. She loses that training which is one of the most useful results of four years at Vassar or Bryn Mawr, the training of the executive faculty, energy and perseverance in active endeavor, the ability to make things go.

To meet this serious danger, the coeducational institution must provide, within the circle of the life of the young women themselves, opportunities for this kind of education, through the responsibilities of self-government, social functions, literary societies and clubs of

all sorts, and Christian work. Opportunities such as these, under circumstances where young women can act out their own individuality without the restraints and temptations to self-consciousness arising from the society of young men, can be made to furnish the kind of training sought for almost as satisfactorily as it can be secured in the woman's college.

The separate life of the young women will provide also for training—sometimes by precept, usually by inspiring example—in forms of courtesy and personal social graces, certain of which are learned more quickly in the companionship of women than in mixed society. In the development of the social life of young women on this side tactful women in the faculty circles or in the town, can render invaluable assistance. No one who has not seen the leaven work could dream of the transformation which can be wrought in a few short months by the quickening influence of some cultivated woman who has tactfully seen her chance to uplift an untrained young girl's social ideals. Certainly here is a great work to be done for our college young people.

The separate life of the young women will include also their religious development and work. It has been proved beyond peradventure that the definitely personal religious activities of coeducational colleges are best carried forward where the sexes are separated. In a union religious work unworthy students are likely to secure prominence, with a corresponding shrinking to the rear of those who should lead; there is the possibility of the diversion of the mind from the main theme, a subtle temptation to religious sentimentality, and the danger that under the influence of religious emotion there may be stirred personal feelings which are both untimely and obstructive to thoroughgoing success. These are some of the reasons why the wise leaders of the Y. M. and Y. W. C. A. movements throughout the country have instituted separate religious conferences for young men and young women. They are practically a unit also for a separate work within each institution itself.

In most colleges this separation has been effected in all religious work except that of the Student Volunteers. My observation inclines me strongly to believe that it should be extended to include this work also. Too often we have all seen the labors of some of our

most devoted young men and young women weakened, almost nullified, by the sentimentalism which the union meetings of the Student Volunteers have cultivated. In this fact also lies the secret of the harsh criticism which this movement too frequently receives from the college students at large.

But it is time to turn to the other side of our problem—how to secure a natural, wholesome associate life in our coeducational colleges. That this associate life can be made of the utmost value in the development of both sexes is indisputable. The young men need the social inspiration which the society of women brings, the quickening of the finer impulses and graces. The average young man of college age is uncouth in body and spirit. He needs the atmosphere of cultivation which always surrounds a well-bred woman. The transformations effected by such influences in some of our young men are even more amazing than those wrought by the leaven of new social ideals among the young women.

And this associate life is of equal importance to the young woman. The woman's college must constantly be on its guard against the invasion of a priggish intellectualism, which develops in the natural process of its evolution into critical snobbishness. In the coeducational college, so far as my observation goes, such a spirit does not exist. It can hardly develop in the action and interaction, the give and take, of the free intellectual life where men and women meet on a common plane. In such relationships the spirit of sympathy is not lost, which alone can keep intellectual culture sweet and human, and the intellect preserves the place which belongs to it, of co-ordination rather than supremacy among the powers of mind and soul.

Moreover, the woman's college is subject to attacks of morbid sentimentalism. Isolation from the society of men during the large part of four years of early maturity develops unnatural and oftentimes unworthy feeling. The flurry created in a woman's college by the presence of a caller from the outside world of men is an innocent illustration of what are some of the deep currents of that isolated life.

And the separate life of young women in the woman's college is not seldom cursed by extravagant affections of young women for one another; by "crushes," as the college girl calls them. Dr. Weir Mitchell once said that the extent of the presence of these morbid

attachments in the women's colleges was reason enough for sweeping such colleges from the face of the earth. We shall all of us, no doubt, consider his judgment extreme, but we nevertheless rejoice that such manifestations of unnatural feeling are almost entirely absent from the coeducational college. This fact is one of the strongest arguments which can be presented in favor of coeducation.

The ideal of the associate life of the coeducational college should be a natural, unaffected comradeship. The young men and the young women stand upon this footing in the classroom. Their intellectual competition is governed by the same laws, and the prizes of the struggle are within the reach of each alike. The completeness of this comradeship, begun in the classroom, will depend much upon the discipline of the separate life of each sex. The young men and the young women who have thoroughly developed their own individual life, with its ideals of taste and conduct, have little use for the "spoon," and their trenchant irony and stinging banter have great influence in making the life of the sentimentalist a burden.

Outside the classroom comradeship will naturally find its opportunities in the association into which the classroom life naturally leads—in the buildings, on the campus, on the athletic field. While a wise regulation will discourage, and if necessary, forbid, the meeting of young men and women, of solitary walks or other intimate relationships, it will gladly permit such companionships as are natural, accidental, and courteous, upon the street, in the homes of friends, in the broad light of everyday society in which full safety lies.

A wise regulation will also permit and encourage the association of the young men and the young women in gatherings of special or a general nature, such as class and society social meetings, college receptions, etc. It will insist, however, upon a supervision of all such invitation affairs by proper authority, upon a limitation in the number of such functions, upon simplicity in dress and expenditure, upon early hours; in other words, upon such regulation as shall prevent the social life of the college from becoming its chief activity, to the undermining of all intellectual effort and the breaking down of health itself.

To accomplish these results a few rules will be necessary, that the relations of the young men and the young women may be perfectly

understood. But rules have never accomplished any thoroughly satisfactory result. There must be the tactful insistence upon simple and far-reaching principles, and then the students must be trusted in a generous way to apply these principles in the life of the college. Only in an atmosphere of trust and confidence can the best social life of a coeducational institution develop. It can never be created by negative influences; it must unfold intelligently and spontaneously. And there can be no cordial acquiescence in the vital principles of a true social life, no thorough assimilation of them by the student body, unless the authorities whose work it is to assert and maintain these principles are themselves governed by the spirit of sympathy. Firmness is an indispensable trait in the man or the woman whose duty it is to see that right relations are maintained between the young men and women in our colleges, but the autocrat has no place in such an office. Sweetness and light—or, to use the Scripture equivalent of the famous phrase, grace and truth—are needed in abundant measure by anyone who dares to undertake the most difficult post in all our college administration.

One can hardly estimate the possibilities of the faculty home in developing a right social life in the college. It can have its large place in unfolding the separate life of the young men and the young women, opening its doors to encourage what is of especial interest and help to each. And into its atmosphere of Christian refinement and courtesy and hospitality can be brought the young man and the young woman in their associate life. At the dining-table and in the parlor a new world of thought and feeling can be opened; new impulses, a new sympathy for what is fine and generous, can be stirred into life. The home in the hands of a large-minded man and a gracious lady can be made a more powerful instrument in that deeper education which every true college brings to its students, than any other agency whatsoever.

The test of theory is life. In a college town in the middle West, not many months ago, I looked down from my hotel window upon a football field in which the teams of two coeducational colleges were contending. On the side lines were a host of shrieking young women, and after the game was over the young women of the victorious college marched with the young men in procession down the street,

under my window, screaming and waving their banners. If this is what coeducation means, I said to myself, I want none of it. This is coeducation, but coeducation of a crude and a vulgar type. It is not the form it necessarily takes. But it certainly will take this form so long as the student body is left free of restraint to work out its own salvation or its own destruction. How to steer between an iron constraint and an unregulated freedom that degenerates into license, is, I repeat, the most difficult of the problems of the coeducational college. The problem can be solved, but only by those who recognize its difficulty and its far-reaching scope, and who are willing to bring to its study not only a calm and clear-headed judgment, an unsubduable patience, an inflexible persistence, but also a tactful and generous sympathy which never for a moment forgets its own college days.